

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The White Tower*, by James Ramsey Ullman. 8vo.; 479 pages.  
Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1945. \$3.00.

Five mountain climbers, of as many nationalities, and a guide, meet during wartime by super-coincidences in Kanderstatt, Switzerland, where they determine to attempt a new route on an unidentifiable local peak, strangely Himalayan in stature. Their adventures over two weeks on this climb, during which each one reveals his philosophy in the way in which he tackles difficulties, comprise the story. The non-climber, accepting it at face value will find it a thrilling tale.

The experienced mountaineer, however, cannot fail to compare the details of the story with his own experiences and to raise many questions as to the accurate rendering of a great climb. But there are probably 10,000 non-climbers who will read this book to every reader who is an expert, and it is a fact that if one wishes to popularize mountaineering by writing a best-seller which features a mountain ascent, one will have to picture it the way the public wants it to read, with each thrill raised to the Nth degree.

In *The White Tower* a mountaineer who knows the Alps will be quick to criticize many features in the description of the ascent—jumping *up* over a bergschrund; cutting steps in ice which is found to *overlay* snow; an icefall, with séracs, located *above* the bergschrund; *five* kinds of rock on one peak—are a few examples. However, there is no argument but that Mr. Ullman has done an outstanding service for mountain climbing in presenting the subject in a way which has aroused great interest in mountaineering among the American public. An entire Fifth Avenue publisher's window features it; on the subway and suburban trains war-workers and shopgirls are engrossed in reading it, and we cannot at this moment foresee what a popular lift it will undoubtedly give to mountaineering in the summer of 1946, perhaps with Hollywood's help.

While this reviewer would like to see the author produce a novel based on the milder actual experiences of some true Alpine ascent, the reading public has changed greatly since *Running Water*, and such a book today would probably fall flat. Let us then recognize that *The White Tower*, by depicting almost every imaginable

technique of climbing hung on to what might be called a "Beispiel-spitze," is rapidly awakening throughout the country a keen interest in mountaineering.

J. E. F.

*Brenva*, by T. Graham Brown. 8vo., 225 pages, with 72 photographs and a map. London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1944. Price 25 s.

The Brenva face of Mont Blanc, facing almost directly toward the Italian side of the Col du Geant, is one of the few great Alpine faces which has not attracted a swarm of suicide climbers during the past decade. Unlike the Eigerwand, the N. faces of the Grandes Jorasses and Matterhorn, and the pinnacles of the Wilder Kaiser, relatively little climbing has been done here and that little by a few individuals. This book is the chronicle of ten years' devotion to this problem by the climber who knows it best.

During the First World War Dr. Brown dreamed of the Brenva face, which he knew only from the pages of a novel, but it was not until 1926 that he first saw it, was drawn by its challenging beauty, and delineated the three great ridges: The Sentinelle, Route Major, and Via della Pera which together form his "triptych." For the next ten years he devoted most of his considerable mountaineering energies to the conquest, one by one, of these superb routes which undoubtedly are three of the grandest climbs in the Alps. It is unique that the larger part of the climbing history of so great a face should have been made exclusively by one man and his several companions.

From his book one can clearly see how entranced with his "triptych" the author became. His tale is really a romance between the mountain and the man, but the man is a scientist, and woven into his romance we find precise measurements, detailed descriptions, and exact times. In places the story is repetitious and drawn out, particularly in developing the theme of the "triptych." In the more dramatic situations the author underplays the action with that understatement which we Americans claim is typically British. The reader regrets at times that the style is not more spontaneous.

*Brenva* can serve as a climbing guide to the Brenva face of Mont Blanc, and also as an absorbing bit of Alpine history. The full page photographs are superb and very skillfully captioned. They are gathered together at the end of the volume (an exigency